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Daniela Ortiz dos Santos

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Center for Critical Studies in Architecture (CCSA) was founded in 2017. What makes it so unique is the fact that it is a cooperation between an art history department, an architectural faculty and the German Architecture Museum (DAM). Accordingly, it combines three different cultures of architectural research: namely curatorial practice, architectural history and architectural education. Right from the start the activities of the CCSA were built on joint seminars, colloquia, workshops and lecture series attended by students from art history, architecture and curatorial studies. The common basis for all these events is a strong belief in the potential of academic teaching as a point of departure for research. This general conviction has already led to a number of projects that differ in scope and format: from lecture series on concepts of order in architecture and architectural theory to Bauhaus narratives and Bauhaus archives, from exhibitions and conferences on architects and public intellectuals like Max Bächer (1925-2011) to more individual research on Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966) and modern architectural criticism, to mention only a few. In 2019, the CCSA launched its publication series CCSA Topics with the first volume *Max Bächer: 50 Meter Archive*, documenting a seminar and an exhibition on the Bächer files kept in the archive of the DAM. With the new research cluster "Architectures of Order: Practices and Discourses between Design and Knowledge", funded by the Hessian program for academic excellence, the CCSA yet again substantially broadened its perspective. Scholars from sociology, legal history, media studies, historical studies, urban planning, art history and architectural theory focus on architecture as a cultural technique for creating order.

Though varying in their disciplinary approaches, all the researchers involved share the principle view that archival materials as well as interdisciplinary perspectives are indispensable for the analysis of architectural and urban phenomena. Along with a first

international conference on the architecture metaphor that will be held by the end of the year, the cluster will also start a fellowship program allowing excellent scholars from abroad to join this interdisciplinary group of principal investigators, postdocs and PhD candidates. The overall aim of these initiatives is to establish a permanent forum for architectural research in Germany which to date does not yet exist. The research on Max Cetto conducted by the Center's coordinator Daniela Ortiz dos Santos could be regarded as a typical CCSA project. It started with an experimental seminar on the Cetto files kept in the DAM and subsequently evolved into a fascinating set of important questions targeting the self-understanding of architectural research: to what degree are narratives of modern architecture dependent on the displacement of ideas, people and archival materials? In what sense do architectural archives and collections have to be considered as machines of knowledge production, as has already been stated in cultural studies? And finally, what is the impact of the loss, invisibility or even ignorance of archival material on the way in which we consider the history of architecture?

Carsten Ruhl

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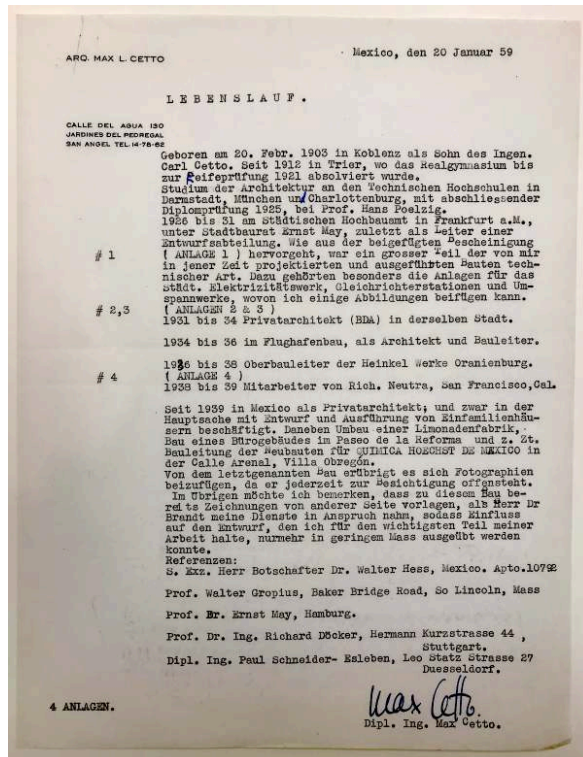
- 1 Can displacement produce an effect on the narratives of architectural history? Although this question may seem straightforward at first glance, answering it poses considerable demands and requires analysis. The approach taken in this paper begins not so much with the question of the extent to which records of *émigré* architects have served as a source for architectural history, but rather, stems from how oblivious architectural schools have been to these debates, and moreover, what kind of role architectural archives have played in this process.¹ To me it is a question that expands the expected and traumatic after-effects of diaspora, as well as dealing with the ways in which architectural knowledge is preserved, enacted and commemorated.
- 2 I would like to start with the rhetorical yet provocative statement that archives are neither crystallised nor neutral statements. If one examines the files collected and preserved by *émigré* architects, things may get a bit more complicated.² How to put oneself in the place of the "Other", when encountering this material? What are the tools one may handle while studying these fragments of lives, fragments in lines, lapses in times? Let me start with a particular yet critical example. The dozens of images of the 1936 Jüterbog military airport of the German National Socialist regime that are preserved in the archives of Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt am Main should not go unnoticed. Especially if they are included in a photo album put together by the very same architect who collaborated in designing the airport, and who shortly after had to escape the cruelties of the regime that had commissioned the project. Yet, this album, as well as the materials from this collection that reached the DAM archives in the early nineties, has neither been transformed into sources of knowledge in Germany³, nor been incorporated as a teaching tool for architectural criticism.



Photograph of the Jüterbog Airport Hangar, Germany, circa 1936. © Unknown photographer, Cetto Collection, DAM Archives [419-035-001]

- 3 How to construct a sense of empathy with the private collections of *émigrés*, and how to construct narratives of the collective past? By empathy, I mean not so much the idea of sympathy, but the very effort to be aware of and to re-invent oneself in relation to the Other and to other things. To “re-enact the past in the present”, as Ricoeur suggested.⁴ Furthermore, the institutional decisions to acquire records are not detached from a political agenda that, in turn, is still heavily influenced by dominant discourses and architectural canons. But in saying this, we are only just approaching an important yet much wider problem, which in fact expands the scope of this paper. Instead, I aim to address these questions in a series of experiments conducted at the Center for Critical Studies in Architecture (CCSA). My analysis’ point of departure is the German-born architect Max Ludwig Cetto (1903-1980), and particularly his files, which are preserved at the DAM.⁵ He is the architect of the military airport and the abovementioned photo album. Such an approach was born from a collaborative seminar project, which placed Cetto’s papers at the centre of the debates,⁶ and which argued that *émigré* architects’ files and the histories behind institutional acquisitions may offer an alternative perspective.
- 4 Max Cetto left Europe in 1938 for the United States before settling in Mexico.⁷ Sixteen years after Cetto’s death in 1980, four boxes containing a few dozens of free-hand drawings, twenty-five books, seventy technical plans, six hundred photographs, and more than a thousand papers were delivered to the very place where many of these documents were originally produced. An exchange of fragile materials and itinerant papers that luckily and randomly resisted over time and geographical changes. But why unearth these files today? Beyond being a set of meaningful records of the transatlantic architectural culture from the pre-war period until the Cold War era, the Cetto Collection has offered the possibility to reflect upon a number of methodological

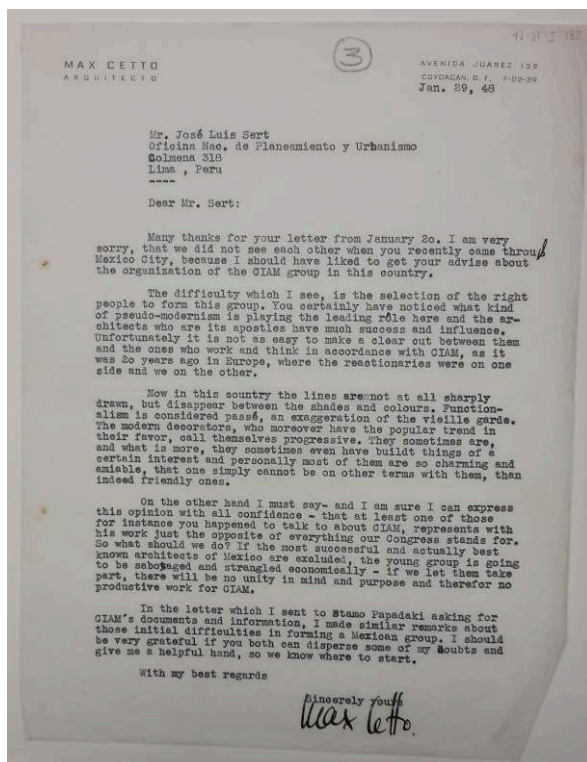
problems in architectural history and education. To begin, I will refer to a problem that I shall call “the invisible files in visible institutions”. These files are invisible, both historiographically and institutionally. In this sense, the Cetto Collection does not deal with documents produced and preserved by an iconic figure, neither in Germany, that is, the place where Cetto was born, nor in Mexico, the country where he made a home after World War II. It deals with the private files of an architect who was a collaborator for most of his life, and whose professional practice and written production were both consistently silenced. It deals with the files of an *émigré*, of someone who left his homeland despite being part of the well-educated technical elite of the Weimar Republic. Finally, it deals with hundreds of documents which were written in at least three different languages.



Cetto's curriculum vitae in German, signed and dated 20.01.1959 © Cetto Collection, DAM Archives [419-035-002]

- 5 A short detour through Cetto's biography may be worthwhile. The Koblenz-born architect began a promising career after graduating under the celebrated architect and professor Hans Poelzig (1869-1936) in Berlin. The offer to collaborate with Ernst May (1886-1970) in the pioneering architectural and urban project for the city of Frankfurt catapulted Cetto into the international debates on modern architecture. Such a promising professional career combined with a social capital linked to a network of the Congrès international d'architecture moderne [CIAM] and Poelzig's circles, was, however, insufficient to establish a comfortable arrival overseas. Although Cetto was part of the avant-gardist debates, as Susanne Dussel Peters reveals, his voice generated little echo in the US and Mexican circles of the interwar and postwar period.⁸ Following Cetto's own words, addressed to Josep Lluís Sert (1902-1983) in a letter written in 1948 – that is, one year after acquiring Mexican citizenship – there was a dominant discourse in Mexico that embraced a different understanding of modernity than the majority of the European CIAM members. Cetto included himself in the latter group.

- 6 “The difficult which I see, is the selection of the right people to form this group [Mexican CIAM Delegation]. You certainly have noticed what kind of pseudo-modernism is playing the leading role here and the architects who are its apostles enjoy considerable success and influence. Unfortunately, it is not as easy to make a clear cut between them and the ones who work and think in accordance with CIAM, as it was 20 years ago in Europe, when the reactionaries were on one side and we on the other. Now in this country, the lines are not at all sharply drawn but disappear between the shades and colours. Functionalism is considered *passé*, an exaggeration of the *vieille garde*. The modern decorators, who moreover have the popular trend in their favour, call themselves progressive.” Letter from Cetto to Sert, dated 29.01.1948 (nr. 42-JS-5-182, CIAM Archives, gta Archives/ETH Zurich)



Letter from Max Cetto to José Luis Sert dated 29.01.1948 © CIAM Archives, gta Archives/ETH Zurich [nr. 42-JS-5-182]

- 7 In this sense, Cetto's invisibility has a double meaning. On the one hand, there is an invisibility consistent with being labelled as a perpetual collaborator of celebrated protagonists – Ernst May during the Frankfurt years and Luís Barragán (1902-1988) for the Mexican period⁹, to mention but two examples. On the other hand, here too, the invisibility takes on a critical aspect because of his own *émigré* status, whose surviving existing personal files resisted the turbulences caused by displacement. Making these files visible is perhaps the very first step to opening several other hidden boxes that may contribute to reframing current architectural debates on displacement. And this also includes an approach intersected with the history of archival institutions, such as the one that holds Cetto's files in Frankfurt. The landing of these materials in the DAM was not a natural process. Instead, the back-and-forth of letters between that institution and the family reveals the meandering process of negotiation. They evoke, furthermore, the shifting position held by the DAM in the late eighties and early nineties. After the 1987 departure of the founding director Heinrich Klotz (1935-1999),

this institution enlarged its political agenda towards architectural records, meaning it was no longer exclusively oriented towards acquiring selected documents signed by international and known figures who were part of Klotz's circles.

- 8 DAM archivist Evelyn Hils-Brockhoff played an important role in this exchange with the Cettos. Her paper published in the 1996 Yearbook of the museum considered the acquisition of Cetto's bequest as a great triumph, in which he is introduced as a German Mexican architect, who "paved the way for modern Mexican architecture".¹⁰ More challenging (and much more interesting) a task is to intersect Hils-Brockhoff's paper with the correspondence she maintained with the family. They both include ample evidence for the argument that the Cetto Collection resulted from a careful selection process. Firstly, by Cetto himself, and secondly, by his wife Catarina Cetto, in collaboration with Susanne Dussel Peters. These letters leave no doubt as to the fact that the selection criteria insisted on Cetto's more visible relations with Germany. This means that these relations referred to his Berlin education and early career in Frankfurt, and abruptly jumped to his lectures and reports on Mexican architecture overseas, his exchanges with academics and his participation in the 1966 international competition for the Berlin Tiergarten Museum.¹¹

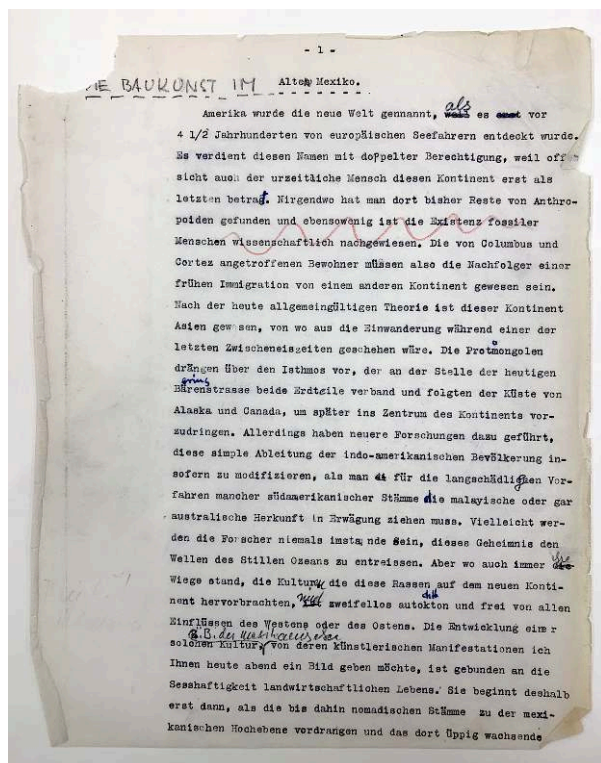


Photograph of the viewpoint in the Ostpark in Frankfurt am Main, 1929 © photographer unknown, Cetto Collection, DAM Archives [419-013-003]

- 9 Cetto's biographical paths found in his files are no less interesting. If one begins by examining the excellent curriculum constructed by Cetto, which was regularly attached to the letters he sent to American and German scholars, it is easy to identify the fertile network in which this architect was immersed as well as the collective discourse he himself contributed to construct. Countless documents also indicate Cetto's great interest in continuing the exchanges with Poelzig's graduates, such as with his fellow student Konrad Wachsmann (1901-1980) or with CIAM members of the interwar German chapter, such as Richard Döcker (1894-1968), who held a leading position in

postwar Germany. The surviving records proving Cetto's professional experience in the Frankfurt urban and housing programme during the 1920s, his strong engagement with the 2nd CIAM meeting of 1929 which took place in the same city, not to mention the open letter published in the Swiss magazine *Die Stadt* addressed to the German Minister of Propaganda Paul Joseph Goebbels in 1933,¹² are just a few of a large amount of vestiges that emphasise his position as an intellectual who aspired to be a protagonist in the German architectural debates after the Great War.

- 10 The forced experience of displacement transformed Cetto's perspectives and discourse on architecture. The new and old architecture of Mexico – titles of his lectures held in Postwar Germany –, as well as the manuscripts preserved in his collection, are critical sources for repositioning the idea of modern architecture circulating in Europe and the Americas. It is not so much the notion of cultural transfer I am evoking here. Rather, it is a concept similar to what Reto Geiser suggests in his book *Giedion and America*,¹³ in which there is an invitation to constantly update the survival tools for negotiating meaning in architectural narratives. Beyond attempting to recollect biographical facts, these records produced and kept by Cetto unfold multi-layered stories, in particular those that intersect the architectural discourse with the political and diplomatic ideologies of the pre- and postwar period in the Atlantic World.



Page of Cetto's lecture "Die Baukunst im Alten Mexiko", circa 1955 © Cetto Collection, DAM Archives [419-043-002]

NOTES

1. To say that studies that have intersected the ideas of displacement, domesticity and architecture have enormously increased in the past years is nothing new. The introduction of these debates into the teaching activities of architectural schools, and in architectural history and theory courses are, however, still rarely performed. Yet, a number of research clusters based in Europe, whose commitment to work on new teaching and research tools on this subject, are worth being mentioned here: the group project "Relocating Modernism. Global Metropolises, Modern Art and Exile", based at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich and led by Burcu Dogramaci; the research agency Forensic Architecture, headed by Eyal Weizman, and based at Goldsmiths, University of London; the Decolonizing Architecture course, headed by Alessandro Petti at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, Sweden; the Chair of History of Modern Architecture headed by Ita Heinze-Greenberg at the gta Institute/ETH Zurich; the Jornadas de arquitectura vasca en el exilio, headed by Juan José Arrizabalaga and based at the University of the Basque Country; the Transfer Lab, whose principal investigators are Paolo Scrivano and Gaia Caramellino at the Politecnico di Milano; the Center for Documentary Architecture, headed by Ines Weizman, and based at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar; and the research group "Architecture, Interiority, Inhabitation", headed by Hilde Heynen at the KU Leuven, who in 2019 organized the conference *Displacement & Domesticity Since 1945: Refugees, Migrants & Expats Making Homes* and published a "teaching tool kit" which, according to the organizers, served "as a starting point for scholars working on the history and theory of displacement and domesticity".

2. Without exhausting the list of important publications on this subject, I would like to mention, however, a few projects that were seminal for the Cetto Project: Dogramaci, B. *Kulturtransfer und nationale Identität: Deutschsprachige Architekten, Stadtplaner und Bildhauer nach 1927*, Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2008; Falbel, A. "Immigrant Architects in Brazil: A Historiographical Issue", *DOCOMOMO Journal*, vol. 34, 2005, p. 58-65; Falbel, A. "Sobre utopia e exílios na América Latina", *Politéia*, no. 9, 2009, p. 107-140; Heinze-Greenberg, I. "Bauhäusler in der Emigration: Die Schweiz als Zwischenstation, Exil und Heimat", in: *Die Schweizer Avantgarde und das Bauhaus*, Zürich: gta Verlag, 2019, p. 203-220; Heinze-Greenberg, I. "Erich Mendelsohn's Mediterranean Longings: The European Mediterranean Academy and Beyond", in: *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean: Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*, New York, London: Routledge, 2009, p. 175-191; Heynen, H. *Sibyl Moholy-Nagy: Architecture, Modernism and its Discontents*, London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019; Lira, J. *Warchavchik: fraturas da vanguarda*, São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2011; Schaetzke, A. *Transatlantische Moderne: deutsche Architekten im lateinamerikanischen Exil*, Münster: Monsenstein und Vannerdat, 2015; von Hanffstengel, R. [et al.]. *Mexiko, das wohltemperierte Exil*, Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Interculturales Germano-Mexicanas, 1995; "Migration and exile among architects, urbanists and landscape architects in the modern era" (C. Maniaque, M. Gaimard eds.), *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale, urbaine et paysagère*, no. 2, 2018, online available at <<https://journals.openedition.org/craup/456>>; Said, E. "Reflections on Exile", *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001]

3. It is important to mention Susanne Dussel Peters' pioneering work on Cetto, but whose impacts were hardly a concern in the architectural debates, aside from the studies of modern architecture in Mexico. See, Dussel Peters, Susanne. "Die Architektur Hannes Meyers und Max Cettos : Von der deutschen Moderne nach Mexico", in : *Mexiko, Das wohltemperierte Exil*, p. 233-252

4. Ricoeur, Paul. *The Reality of the historical past*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984, p. 5

5. The first letter exchanged between the Cetto family and the DAM is dated 02.03.1993. Writing to Mr. Fischer, Catarina Cetto asked if the DAM was interested in her husband's files. She also

requested this correspondence be kept as part of the Cetto Collection and informed him that the files written in Spanish would remain in Mexico. Source: DAM Archives.

6. This project would not have been possible without the generosity of the DAM archives, headed by Katja Leiskau. I also thank Carsten Ruhl, Oliver Elser, Wolfgang Welker, Susanne Peters, Bruno Maurer, Almut Grunewald, Daniel Weiss, Nicolas Pérez Diego, and Bettina Cetto, for the exchanges and support. Further information on the seminar project and colloquium is available online at the CCSA homepage (criticalarchitecture.org).

7. See, Dussel Peters, Susanne. *Max Cetto (1903-1980): Arquitecto Mexicano Alemán*, Ciudad de México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1995

8. Cetto's exchanges with the CIAM directors which are preserved in the DAM Archives shall be analysed together with those preserved in the gta Archives/ETH Zurich, which holds extraordinary letters from Cetto to Giedion from the twenties to the fifties, as well as letters to J. L. Sert and to S. Papadaki, dated from the fifties.

9. Initiated in 1939, the collaboration between Cetto and Barragán would only end in 1954. See, Dussel Peters, Susanne. *Max Cetto*, p. 138-160.

10. Hils-Brockhoff, Evelyn. "Zum Nachlass von Max Cetto (1903-1980)", *DAM Architektur Jahrbuch*, München, New York: Prestel, 1996, p. 178-183

11. Cetto's papers are held by the DAM and in the archives of the UAM in Mexico. The Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, the Archiv-Bauhaus in Berlin and the gta Archives/ETH Zurich also preserve important letters Cetto exchanged with Gropius and with members of the CIAM, respectively.

12. This letter is available online in the digital library of the University of Heidelberg <digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/neue_stadt1933_1934/0033/image>

13. Geiser, Reto. *Giedion and America: Repositioning the History of Modern Architecture*, Zurich: gta Verlag, 2018

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Daniela Ortiz dos Santos is an assistant professor at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. She has co-curated the exhibitions on architecture, films and archives *Moving Constructions* at Garagem Sul in Lisbon (2019) and *gta Films* at the gta Exhibitions in Zurich (2017), whose results appeared in the *gta Papers* no.3 (2019). Her recent publication includes "Blaise Cendrars et Le Corbusier: villes et voyages utiles" in *Komodo21* no.9 (2018) and her forthcoming work includes the co-edition of the proceedings of the CCSA Bauhaus Lecture Series.